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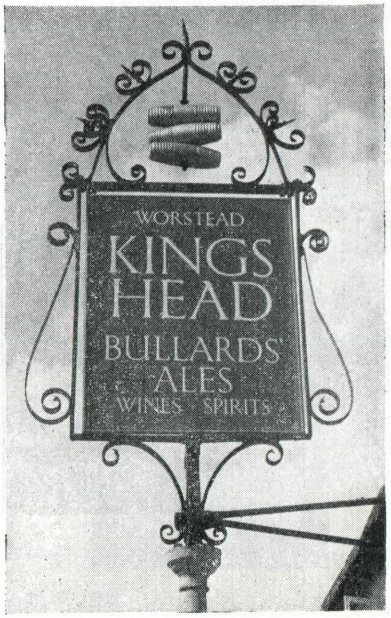
IN THIS ISSUE

TRIALS OF A GHOST HUNTER • THE NORWICH HATTERS
MIDSUMMER COMMON • THE STORY OF AN ABBOT'S SEAL
EAST ANGLIAN RECIPES • LETTERS • UNCONSIDERED TRIFLES
EAST ANGLIAN HUMOUR



THE SIGN OF THE KING'S HEAD

THIS fine inn sign outside the King's Head, Worstead, Norfolk, is complete with 'corkscrew'. Can your readers tell me of similar interesting inn signs as I wish to photograph them and add them to my collection?—*P. E. Batten*, 139 *First Avenue, Manor Park, E.*12.

THE RICHER FAMILY

I AM anxious to discover some information about my ancestors who, I understand, fled from France during the revolution. My great-grandfather was James Askew Richer (b. 1807) and his wife Sophia (b. 1809). I have been told there is a church in Suffolk containing tablets to the Richer family. I would appreciate any information.—*Mrs. Grace A. Burrell*, 35 *Madeley Road, Ealing, London, W.*5.

NEW CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. K. J. Allison (page 134) was born and educated in Norwich. Is interested in local history, archaeology and natural history. Studied at the University of Leeds for six years, three of them on research into Norfolk economic history. Worked on the lost villages of Norfolk in the 16th and 17th centuries. Is hoping to continue work on Norfolk history after completing his national service.

Jean Menter (page 176) was born in Edinburgh and went to school in St. Andrews. Came to Girton College in 1944 to read English and Economics. In 1947 married a physicist and has lived in Cambridge ever since. Taught for two years and then became occupied with her own family, two boys and a girl now aged six, four and two respectively. Misses her native hills but prefers the Cambridge climate and thinks Cambridge, with its many green spaces, a good place for children.

R. W. Sinclair (page 185) was born 31 December 1894 in Norwich and educated in that city. He was for many years in business as assistant to the late Thos. H. Keith, auctioneer and valuer. Later became chief technical assistant to the late Wm. Smith, Land Agent and Valuation Officer for Norfolk. After Mr. Smith's death he acquired the old-established business of Keith and Smith, land agents and auctioneers, of which he is the sole principal and agent for several well-known Norfolk estates. Former hobbies have included gymnastics, cycling, rowing, fencing, and in latter years pen-and-ink sketching, marquetry picture making and gardening. Married and has one son and one daughter, both now married.

Trials of a Ghost Hunter

By PHILIP A. JAGGARD

We collide in the passage and hurl ourselves downstairs.

IT all started a few years ago with the newspaper head-line 'Nun Haunts Manor House'—not a startling headline, particularly when you consider the propensity of nuns for haunting. But this nun and this house were of very special interest to me, since the house—and presumably the disembodied nun—had once belonged to my family.

In those days it seemed a rather unprepossessing building and, although roughly 14th century in origin, later renovations had not improved it and it looked a rather ordinary brick farmhouse of indeterminate age. It stood—and stands—on high ground a few miles from Sudbury, looking over a wide vista of the Stour valley, remote and difficult of access except by nearly a mile of rough and overgrown lane, standing sentinel on its slight eminence over a huddle of stables and thatched barn with the medieval air of a scene by Durer. It was never news in those days—but it was headlines now. The new owner who had bought it as a retreat and begun restorations had disturbed more than bricks and mortar it

seemed. He had aroused one of the earliest inhabitants—the lady abbess whose residence it once was.

According to existing records a certain Sir Richard de Cornerd, when lord of the manor, is said to have sold it to the convent of Malling in Kent some time in the 14th century and in the returns of lords of manors in 1316 the Abbess of Malling is said to be 'lord' of Great Cornard. The manor passed to the Crown on the dissolution of the monasteries.

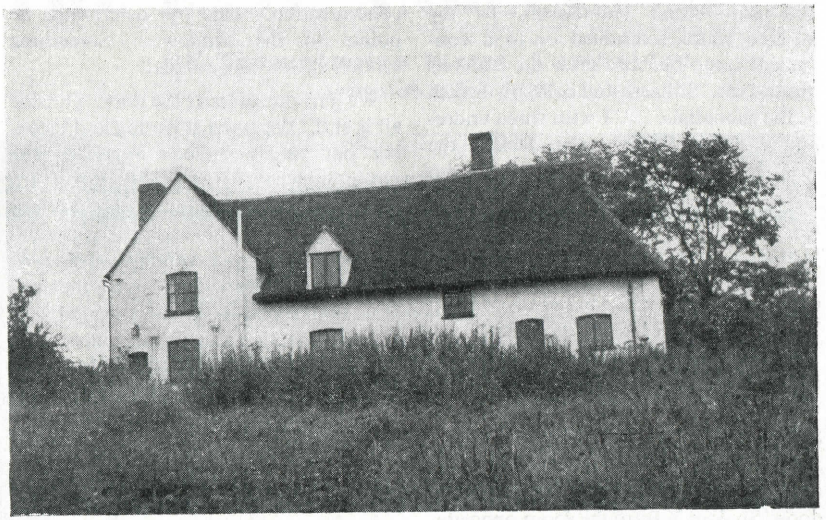
Americans from nearby aerodromes told blood-chilling stories to an eager press.

And now, again, the abbess was being disturbed, not by a mere change of ownership, but by the antiquarian zeal of the new owner. So she gathered up her skirts and walked. The news got around. Next to royalty, our trans-Atlantic cousins dearly love a ghost. Americans from aerodromes 60 miles away arrived by taxi and jeep and with the permission (at first) of its hospitable owner spent a night at the hall. They told stories to an eager press that chilled the blood. . . . rustling draperies, footsteps, harpischord music, intense cold—even paralysis! As one who followed after I can say that the rye whisky consumption as evidenced by the state of the dustbin and surroundings would have paralysed an elephant.

LIVING in a nearby university city at the time and knowing that there was undergraduate interest in psychical research (telepathy and E.S.P. was all very well but, oh, for a haunted house!) the opportunity was too good to be missed.

One bright Saturday in early spring, therefore, four of us set off by car for Abbas Hall. The owner, outwardly sceptical, was again hospitality itself. By pre-arrangement we picked up the keys in Sudbury and very soon were turning into the long, narrow drive. The hall could be dimly discerned almost a mile away on its hill, part of the roof and chimneys showing through the trees. The lane became more tortuous and overgrown. Brambles tore at the mudguards. Then we were in the farmyard, with the house brooding above us on a steep rise.

It was late afternoon and cold, with a hint of frost. We let ourselves in and surveyed the big, stone-flagged courtroom where we were to spend most of



Abbas Hall stands on high ground looking over the valley of the Stour.

East Anglian Magazine photo.

the night. Our breaths billowed on the still air—God, it was cold! A huge open fireplace, big enough to roast an ox with room to spare, confronted us. It was empty. The shades of night were falling—so was the frost. The first essential was a fire. Nobody seemed keen to be left behind, so we all set off to the nearby wood and foraged. On the way back we discovered old, discarded beams from the house lying in the grass, half rotten but excellent as fuel. We piled them high in that vast cavity where they burned cheerfully from bottom to top, casting capering shadows around the room and twinkling on the old swords and bits of armour with which it was festooned. Despite the heartening blaze, the room got steadily colder. We sat in overcoats or swathed ourselves in blankets like a conclave of Indian braves.

By now it was dark and intensely still, except for an occasional crack or hiss from the fire, which sent all its heat up the immense chimney. While the temperature dropped steadily, we discussed the story of a recent tenant who had claimed to be on intimate terms with the abbess, although she had never seen that disturbed spirit. Night after night, according to this most intelligent lady, she would be sitting up writing or reading in the adjoining smaller room when, usually at the same hour, the door would open quietly. Her cats, lying in the hearth, would look up, eyes wide and gleaming while they followed stealthy footsteps across the room . . .

MIDNIGHT approached. With a little reluctance, we decided to scatter—two upstairs and one in each of the two principal ground-floor rooms. I climbed the stairs, with chattering teeth

and diminishing enthusiasm, to my allotted room, scrambled on to a convenient camp bed and drew the blankets around me. Stillness and cold, my breath in the moonlight . . . I with three undergrads, the only one who lacked the orthodox scientific scepticism, who would rather have a dog or a cat as a psychic barometer than a whole battery of infra-red cameras.

I'm dropping into a chilled uneasy coma, in which the Abbess of Malling has somehow been transferred to Borley Rectory and, sitting in the bucket, is being drawn rapidly up and down the well shaft by a nun at the windlass. Suddenly there is a yell. I kick into spasmodic wakefulness, sudden realization and pricking of the scalp. I dash for the door. So does X from the room opposite. We collide in the passage and hurl ourselves down the stairs. Y in the smaller room is standing in an attitude of extreme concentration. Pale but determined he points to the window. 'Something scratched, like fingernails!'

We hurl ourselves at the door. Outside all is still. We stand shivering and listening but only a bullock moves in the moon-drenched barns below. We return and confer. Y is adamant. He was not asleep. It was, he said, like a hand groping across the window—inside or out he doesn't know. We agree that one of us shall spend the rest of the vigil with Y, the remaining two in the court-room. We return to our chairs and blankets. The dark slowly turns grey. We munch sandwiches and pour wine. Outside, grass and thatch sparkle with the rising sun. We stamp out the embers of the fire, tidy up and, cold and stiff, are soon pushing frightened rabbits before us down the lane.

Abbas Hall haunted? I wonder!

PUBLISHERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE WAY TO AN EAST ANGLIAN'S HEART

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THE BINDING OF VOLUMES

The October 1956 issue completed volume 15. Your copies can be bound attractively in green cloth, lettered in gold, for 16s. 6d. An index and a title page are included free of charge.

Copies for binding should be sent to the East Anglian Magazine, 6 Great Colman Street, Ipswich. Previous volumes can be accepted.

May we also mention for the benefit of those readers whose volumes are not complete that some (although not all) back issues are available.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The Editor is always pleased to receive articles of East Anglian interest. They need not necessarily be illustrated. The maximum length is normally about 2,000 words, though anything shorter may be suitable. They should be addressed to the Editor, East Anglian Magazine, 6 Great Colman Street, Ipswich.

THE EAST ANGLIAN SCENE

Off Trumpington Street, Cambridge

A photograph by R. E. Batten